

SCHOOL ABANDONMENT AT THE LEVEL OF ROMA POPULATION

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Abstract: *School abandonment is a serious problem faced by the contemporary society; school has become to be abandoned, above all, because today it does not matter in the hierarchs, it is not perceived as a value in itself; both children and pupils no longer think of school as a future. The effects of school dropout show that this type of behavior is considered particularly serious. First, those who abandon school do not have the professional qualification indispensable for the socio-economic integration, nor the moral and civic formation necessary for the exercising the parent and the citizen role of a community. Secondly, with no qualifications, those who drop out of school are the future unemployed and represent, in a medium and long term, the source of social and loss-making difficulties that exceed the investment required by the initial training. Our article analyzes the school drop out among Roma children from several general perspectives on the education of Roma children. A first perspective, which could be called the socio-economic one, attempts to explain the poor school attendance of Roma children as a direct consequence of the poverty situation in which a large part of this population is found. A second type of approach, related to the ethnic stereotypes, explains the reduced school participation of the Roma through cultural differences, by their different lifestyles.*

Keywords: school dropout; Roma ethnicity; education; interculture; school integration.

1. Introduction

School abandonment is the ultimate evasion of stopping school attendance, leaving the education system, regardless of the level attained, prior to obtaining a full professional qualification or training, or before completing the starting cycle. (Neamțu, 2003: 21).

This is the result of a combination of internal and external causes, internal factors and external factors. Each abandon has a personal and social history related to how the principle of development is differentiated. School failure is the product of several causal factors in a certain pedagogical, psychological and social configuration that in turn leads to more immediate and lasting consequences.

School abandonment is a problem of the Romanian education system that has not been adequately dealt with, a serious problem which must be urgently converted into a complex intervention strategy. It is certainly a

phenomenon that, through its significant consequences and its worrying dimensions, must be present in the priorities agenda of decision-makers, practitioners and beneficiaries in the education system. To take measures to combat school drop-out, a diagnostic study is needed to highlight the abandonment rate, which are the areas most affected by this phenomenon and especially which are the main causes for all school-age groups. School abandonment also has different meanings: leaving the education system before completing compulsory education, leaving the system before graduating one of its levels, leaving the system, regardless of level, without obtaining the diploma attesting the completion of that level education, leaving the education system without obtaining a certificate that offers the possibility of integration into the labor market, the premature exit from the secondary level of education without the integration into “second chance” programs, etc.

In consensus with the Constitution, the Education Law states that education is a national priority and stipulates the right to education of all citizens, their right to learn in their native language, and respect for the right to cultural and linguistic heritage of minorities. Thus, these rights are expressed in different regulations at national level through the following provisions:

- organization of school units, groups / classes with teaching in the minority language at all types, levels and forms of education;
- inclusion in the curriculum, in the case of Romanian language teaching units, of the study of the native language with the same weight as the Romanian language, as well as of the history and traditions of the national minority in the respective language;
- reflection of the history and traditions of each minority in the educational curriculum;
- providing appropriate textbooks and teaching materials in their native language;
- teaching religion in the native language;
- preparing the teaching staff in the respective ethnic minority language;
- supporting a test in the native language in the final examinations (capacity exam - at the end of compulsory education, baccalaureate exam - at the end of high school).

Access to education for all children and young people is also facilitated by a social protection system that includes different forms:

- no tuition fees for education, assistance and logistical base and, respectively, free textbooks, medical and psychological assistance for pupils and children in the pre-school education system;
- financing / co-financing from the state budget: full financing of the cost of school preparation for the preparatory group; co-financing maintenance for

- preschoolers by providing social vouchers; co-funding extracurricular activities for high-performing students;
- providing services and institutional facilities: providing scholarships to students with special school results and social assistance grants to those from economically disadvantaged families, reducing travel costs by means of public transport;
- the social protection of children and pupils with special educational needs through the organization and functioning of appropriate institutions, classes/ groups for preschools and pupils with special needs.

2. Non-schooling at the level of rural education units with a Roma population

In 2003, EU Member States agreed to reduce the proportion of early school leavers to less than 10% of all 18-24 year olds. This target has not yet been reached. One out of six young people in that age group completed only the gymnasium cycle or less. According to statistical data, the highest values of school drop-out are recorded at the transition from the gymnasium cycle to high school (high school and general school).

The EU 2020 Strategy launched in March 2010 to replace the Lisbon Strategy proposes five lines of action:

- Increasing the employment rate of the population (between 20-64 years) from 69% to 75%;
- Maintaining the target of 3% of the Gross Domestic Product allocated to research and development;
- 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (30% under certain conditions), 20% increase in energy from renewable sources, 20% increase in energy efficiency,
- Reduce the dropout rate to 10% and increase the number of tertiary education graduates from 31% to 40%;
- Reduce the number of people living below the poverty line by 25%.

Thus, the European Union recommends by 2020:

- Investing in education and training is essential to get out of the crisis;
- Europe's competitiveness on the global market depends on its ability and ability to depend on the growth of innovation and on the transition to a low-carbon, knowledge-based economy;
- The role of education and training in the knowledge triangle (education, research, innovation) needs to be strengthened;
- Lifelong learning and mobility are essential for the acquisition of skills relevant to the labor market, but also for social inclusion and active citizenship.

The evaluation of school dropout and non-schooling, carried out by the secondary analysis of the database elaborated within the research on rural education in Romania, took into account the following indicators:

- the share of education units that include Roma pupils who experience abandonment and non-schooling phenomena in their area of coverage;
- the proportion of non-school pupils and those who dropped out of school before completing compulsory education at school level; in the case of non-schooling the variable is *below 5% and above 5%*, and in the case of abandonment the corresponding values are not, *under 2%, between 2-5%, more than 5%*.

A first aspect that data analysis refers to the high share of educational institutions with Roma children who register cases of non-school children in the area from which they recruit their students. Thus, half of the schools where the Roma population has a share of less than 50% register cases of non-school children and almost 60% of the schools where the majority of Roma pupils are faced with the same phenomenon. It is also noted that while for the whole system of compulsory education units in the rural area there are phenomena of non-schooling in almost one third of the units, in the case of Roma schools the presence of the phenomenon is manifested in half of them. The difference is even greater, reaching up to 25% if the comparison is made only with the school units where the Roma pupils are the majority.

The main category of causes is represented by the socio-familial factors, namely: the negative attitude of the parents towards the school, especially the Roma people; the inability of the family to provide the child with the necessary means of attending the school (clothing, footwear, stationery, etc.) and the child's retention for various household activities. Among the Roma attending low-frequency school may also be indicated as causes: seasonal family migration, child's belonging to nomad families and deviant behaviors manifested by family members (delinquency, alcoholism) and specific traditions (eg. the Roma law - *woman does not have to know much*). A special situation encountered only in the case of Roma children, which teachers invoke as a cause of non-schooling, refers to the lack of identity documents for children, a situation that some teachers impute to the whole family.

The second is represented by the individual causes: the negative attitude of the child towards school, more frequent in the case of Roma children, psycho-intellectual deficiencies or poor health. Of particular importance, especially in the case of pupils belonging to the Roma minority, is the change in the student's civil status (early girls' marriage).

Sociologists believe that dropping out of school is a social issue that generates a set of long-lasting consequences. Research shows that those who drop out of school not only do not have the chances of gaining employment but

are unlikely to be integrated into the workforce. Those who have interrupted their studies are more dependent on maintenance and help programs than the rest of the population.

A student who does not solve school frustrations will soon find out the painful effects of his/her decision. The low power of temperance and lifestyle that inevitably accompany low income generates more frustration, disappointment and stress than most adolescents can imagine.

3. Prejudices, stereotypes related to Roma ethnicity

Formation of stereotypes in children is beginning to catch up with small contours. Differences in the society we live in are multiple. They start from age, religion, physical aspect, mental abilities, sexual orientation, income, social status, and so on. The stereotype is closely linked to prejudice and discrimination. Stereotypes are actually preconceived ideas. They represent a fixed opinion that somebody is about or something about without knowing enough about him/her. These ideas are unfair and unjustified and are built up of an error of knowledge and a generalization that appears about them. Stereotypes of race and ethnicity begin to form in children in the early years of school. As they age, they begin to form cultural stereotypes. They learn how group dynamics work and use such barriers to create grounds for exclusion from the group. For example, you can hear them saying: "He can not be part of our group of friends, because he does not like what we like." Often the existence of negative stereotypes and prejudices about a social group leads to the development of discriminatory behaviors towards it at the social level. The use of a "label" in the absence of a person's knowledge through the rapid generalization of specific individual or group specific experiences at the level of all representatives of that group or culture is usually the basis for the development of sets of behaviors that marginalize, exclude or discriminate against the category to which it is addressed with negative effects on its image over time.

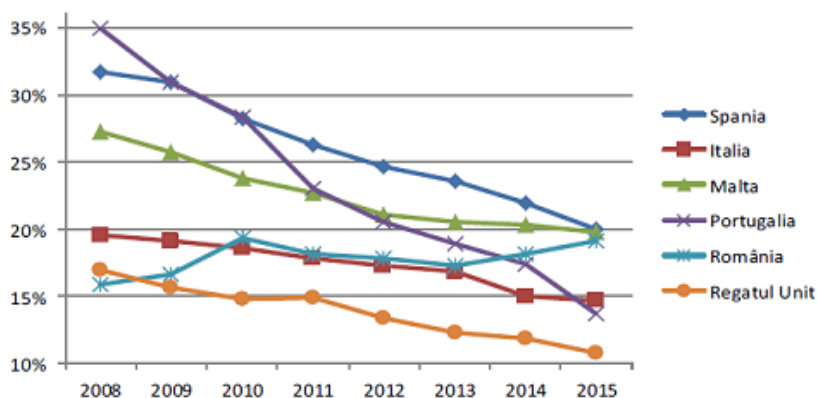
Teachers can help reduce stereotypes and prejudices by: highlighting some group representatives who identify the existence of stereotypes that invalidate the stereotype; providing a significant amount of information about that group - about all the values and norms specific to it and its members; motivating individuals to understand correctly the group they want to communicate with; engaging in activities to achieve common goals; identifying their own stereotypes and prejudices is essential in delivering authentic long-term communication between different cultural groups. It is also the first step towards openness to the other and the development of new perspectives on Roma cultural groups. Each of us labels or we have certain stereotypes at a time. They can prevent us from seeing reality as it is.

The intercultural education aims at developing an education for all in the spirit of recognizing the differences that exist within the same society. We can say that a large part of the gypsy population, so their children too, suffers from the process of marginalization and therefore requires a sustained intervention strategy, addressing both the marginalized and the majority, to form an intercultural society, by different but equal individuals, connected to the general values of humanity and respecting a common set of norms, but at the same time being in a permanent cultural and spiritual exchange. (Pescaru, 2017: 28)

From an intercultural perspective, it is necessary for the school to promote “ethnic attachment and understanding and to help students acquire skills and attitudes that enable the ethnic group to gain the power to signify the great culture of the world.” (Cucos, 2000: 163) The formation of the intercultural attitudes will facilitate the emergence of a synthesis of common elements as a basis for mutual communication and understanding between different cultural groups. By accepting and promoting values such as tolerance, equality, respect, complementarity of values, the school exploits spiritual differences and local values, attaching them to the general values of humanity. Teachers working in schools with a significant proportion of Roma students must accept the challenge and make the children (whether they belong to the majority group or the minority group), become aware that what is different from a colleague is not necessarily dangerous, but also that what resembles you to someone can also distinguish you from someone else (Pescaru, 2017: 31).

4. Measures to reduce the phenomenon of early school leaving

The significant reduction in the number of early school leavers is an essential investment not only in the future of each young person but also in the future prosperity and social cohesion of the European Union in general. Our country's efforts from this perspective do not have the expected results. The vast majority of Member States have improved their school dropout rate, but Romania has managed to move away from the target set in the Social Strategy 2020 - the rate has risen from 15.3% in 2008 to 19.1 % in 2015. The national rate set for 2020 is only 11.3% and the European average was 11% in 2015.



There are also huge gaps between rural and urban: in the 2014-2015 school year, 81.8% of rural children aged 3 to 5/6 were enrolled in pre-school education compared to 97.7% in urban area; the gross enrollment rate in primary and secondary education was 80.4% (100.4% in the urban area) (Ministry of Education 2015). In 2015, the early school leaving rate was 27.8% in rural areas, compared with 19.3% in suburban and suburban areas and 5.9% in large cities. School drop out rates in primary and lower secondary education are significantly higher for rural children, leading to low participation in high school education and, therefore, lower participation rates in tertiary education. The quality of rural education is undermined by the difficulty of attracting highly qualified teachers, inadequate school infrastructure and difficult family situations. In rural areas, there are fewer qualified full-time teachers than in urban areas, so schools have had to hire a large number of low-skilled part-time staff to commute (World Bank 2014).

		România		Media UE	
		2012	2015	2012	2015
Indicatori de referință ET 2020					
Părăsirea școlară timpurie din sistemele de educație și formare (vârsta 18-24 de ani)	Total	17.9%	19.1%	12.7%	11.0%
Ponderele absolvenților de studii superioare (vârsta 30-34 de ani)	Total	21.7%	25.6%	36.0%	38.7%
Educația și îngrijirea copiilor preșcolari (ECEC) (de la vârsta de 4 ani la vârsta de începere a învățământului obligatoriu)		86.4% ¹¹	86.4% ¹⁴	93.2% ¹¹	94.3% ¹⁴
Procent de tineri cu vârsta de 15 ani cu un nivel scăzut de cunoștințe în:	CIRE	37.3%	:	17.8%	:
	Matematică	40.8%	:	22.1%	:
	Știință	37.3%	:	16.6%	:
Rata de angajare a noilor absolvenți pe nivel de învățământ (cu vârsta de 20-34 de ani și care au finalizat sistemul de învățământ cu 1-3 ani înainte de anul de referință)	ISCED 3-8 (total)	70.2%	68.1%	75.9%	76.9%
Participarea adulților la procesul de învățare continuă (vârsta 25-64 de ani)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	1.4%	1.3%	9.2%	10.7%
Alți indicatori contextuali					
Investiții în educație	Cheltuieli publice pentru educație ca procent din PIB	3.0%	3.0% ¹¹	5.0%	4.9% ¹⁴
	Cheltuieli în instituțiile publice și private pentru fiecare student în EUR	ISCED 1-2 €1,625	€1,700 ¹³	:	:
	ISCED 3-4 €1,723	€1,959 ¹³	:	:	
	ISCED 5-8 PPS	€3,932	€2,979 ¹¹	:	:
Părăsirea școlară timpurie din sistemele de educație și formare (vârsta 18-24 de ani)	de origine autohtonă	17.8%	19.1%	11.6%	10.1%
	de origine străină	:	:	24.9%	19.0%
	de origine autohtonă	21.6%	25.6%	36.7%	39.4%
	de origine străină	:	:	33.8%	36.4%
Rata de angajare a noilor absolvenți pe nivel de învățământ (cu vârsta de 20-34 de ani și care au finalizat sistemul de învățământ cu 1-3 ani înainte de anul de referință)	ISCED 3-4	59.3%	59.8%	69.7%	70.8%
	ISCED 5-8	79.1%	77.1%	81.5%	81.9%
Mobilitate în scop educațional	Mobilitatea absolvenților străini (licență)	1.6% ¹¹	2.0% ¹⁴	5.5% ¹¹	5.9% ¹⁴
	Mobilitatea absolvenților străini (master)	2.5% ¹¹	3.0% ¹⁴	13.6% ¹¹	13.9% ¹⁴

Surse: Eurostat (a se vedea secțiunea 9 pentru mai multe detalii); OCDE (PISA).
 Note: Datele se referă la valori medii ponderate ale UE, care acoperă un număr diferit de state membre, în funcție de sursă; b= întreruperi de serii temporale, d= definiție diferită, p= provizorie, u= fiabilitate scăzută, 11 = 2011, 13 = 2013, 14 = 2014.

Strategies to combat early school leaving have as a starting point an analysis of the regional and local specificities of the phenomenon. The data allowed the analysis of the main causes of early school leaving for different pupils, with reference to this phenomenon. The concept of a strategy must be based on precise information, allowing for better measures targeting. The existence of a system to monitor the evolution of early school leaving may contribute to the constant adaptation of strategies based on information such as individual motivations related to early leaving education.

Students who drop out of school are those who have become remarked for absenteeism and other behavioral difficulties, for which they have been repeatedly punished in school. A US Department of Primary and Secondary Education document thus describes the student who is at high risk of dropping out of school: unable to adapt and function properly in the context of the traditional class: under-average school results do not establish professional goals, absenteeism, hostility to adults and representatives of the school authority, comes from a family experiencing existential stress, serious economic problems, is not involved in any non-formal or formal activity organized by school.

A true, real education is grounded in the family, then it continues in kindergarten and school through teachers. First, it is done through the power of the example. A good intervention by the teacher through the educational process he/she carries out with children may be a means of preventing school dropout, which has become more and more frequent. In trying to give some solutions to prevent and eliminate school failure, we must emphasize that it is easier to prevent the phenomenon of school failure than to attempt to remove it after it has already taken place.

At school level, good practices have been implemented to prevent and reduce the early school leaving that consisted of educational activities to increase the attractiveness of the school and to increase pupils' degree of schooling. The empirical studies in Romania (Voicu, 2010: 25-29) and the literature show some good practices to prevent the phenomenon in areas with a high school abandonment rate. These include: partnerships between school, family, community, partnerships based on collaboration, involvement, support; teams of community members involved in school reintegration of children; extracurricular activities (excursions, shows, museum visits, theme competitions, holiday camps, etc.); classroom accountability, open relationships and peer support; enhancing pupils in difficulty through extracurricular educational activities to increase their attachment to school; parenting information and counseling on the needs of children; raising the awareness of the benefits of an appropriate education; implementing alternative second-chance educational programs for those who have dropped out of school; school counseling activities; counseling students and parents to

access funds and legal allowances (scholarships, allowances, requisites, money for the computer) in order to obtain identity documents.

5. Conclusions

School abandonment is a social issue that is subject to factors such as individual, family, and social, so to reduce the drop out rate, teachers have to work with both the student and his/her family. A campaign to inform and empower parents of children about the risk they face when the child does not attend school should therefore be launched. School abandonment will not be eradicated in the coming years, but it could be diminished if all the factors responsible for this phenomenon would properly and timely perform their tasks. Teachers have an important role in motivating students to complete their compulsory studies and make school more attractive. The school and emotional integration of Roma children is a major issue of education. The effectiveness of the efforts of teachers, local authorities and all involved depends on a multitude of factors: socio-economic and family factors, motivational factors, subjective factors related to the values, beliefs and patterns of behavior promoted in the school organization. The role of the school is obviously overwhelming, because one of the primary goals of education is integration. The task of the school is to create an environment in which the child can differentiate his/her feelings and structure himself/herself as a personality, be trained and stimulated by a competitive environment favorable to his/her development.

Attitudes towards school and motivation for learning can also be interpreted as manifestations of the child's self-image. Representations about one's own person are formed over time as a result of a complex of factors and experiences experienced both in the socio-familial and school environment: successes or failures, encouragement or labeling, support or constraint, patterns of behavior, the relationship between membership group and reference groups, etc. The role of the teacher is therefore essential in the integration of each of the children, regardless of ethnicity, religion, social status. Assuming this role involves performing activities that lead to the development of strong, harmonious personalities, following aspects such as: developing the skills to make decisions, negotiate, manifest their emotions; developing the capacity to defend itself; developing empathy; access to and development of creative potential, self-assertion; the development of assertiveness (the ability to tell others what we want without hurting them); developing the capacity to respect differences between people; developing trust. School should be the space for intermingling different experiences, traditions and habits distinct from each minority group. School must be the space where diversity is learned: cultural, ethnic, social, to be a space in which all children feel good, communicate and socialize naturally, regardless of

ethnicity, religion, race or social situation, the space where we learn to live we accept each other with qualities and flaws, with individual features, traditions and customs.

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